

Tens of thousands more could receive tax credit

Program geared toward fixed-income Montgomery County residents

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As many as 40,000 Montgomery County homeowners on a fixed income might be eligible for an expanded property tax credit program, officials announced Monday.

The program, which has in-

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creased significantly in scope since 1999, assists households with members earning up to \$60,000 and who have assets less than \$200,000 not including their homes or retirement accounts.

Previously, the limit was set at

\$50,000 in income and the assets test included the value of residents' homes.

Patrick Lacefield, a public information officer for Montgomery County, said last year an average \$900 credit was awarded to 5,100 homeowners, which is up 80 percent from the previous year. County officials estimate that 30,000 to 40,000 residents might now qualify due to the expanded guidelines. The only obstacle is making as many people as possible aware that they are eligible. For this, the plan is to send mailings to community organizations, make radio and television

public service announcements, put placards on Ride On buses as well as include materials at the county fair.

The expansion was prompted by the fact that assessed home values are rising, Lacefield explained.

"So many people are being squeezed, especially people that are considered house-rich but cash-poor," he said.

Maryland first began offering a tax credit program for people on a fixed income 31 years ago. The state program, too, has expanded dramatically since then.

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